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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7328
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3281
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9435
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003501

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: WEEKEND PROTESTS IN BANGKOK FIZZLE AGAIN

REF: BANGKOK 03445 (DIMINISHED THREAT FROM
DEMONSTRATORS)

Classified By: Political Officer Trent Wilson. Reason 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. The anti-government Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (DAAD) organized more protests in Bangkok June 22-24, but failed to attract their goal of 100,000 protesters for their march on Army headquarters on June 23. Approximately 15,000 protesters braved heavy rains to join the protest on that day. While a significant police presence shadowed the group, there were no reported clashes between security forces and protesters. Protest leaders condemned the coup, called for elections and engaged in surprisingly direct attacks on Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda. Conversations with participants revealed a high level of organization and attendance by rural Northeasterners. Some DAAD leaders have called for the protests to continue, but it is hard to escape the conclusion that the protests have fizzled, for now at least. End Summary.

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN?

12. (SBU) In a continuation of their efforts to build public support for the overthrow of the Surayud government and Council on National Security (CNS), DAAD leaders called for a final push of rallies June 22-24 to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the bloodless coup that abolished the absolute monarchy. DAAD leaders predicted that at least 100,000 people would join their rally at Sanam Luang (the Thai National Mall downtown) and march on Army headquarters. WELCOME TO THE SHOW

13. (SBU) Poloff and PolFSN joined the crowd at Sanam Luang on June 23. Despite looming thunder clouds, approximately 4,000 people were gathered in front of the massive DAAD stage, listening to speakers exorcise the CNS and praise Thaksin. Accompanying the crowd--which appeared, for the first time, to be divided in several well-organized groups--were an increasingly large number of food and anti-government memorabilia vendors. Representatives from each of the anti-coup groups represented by the DAAD oversaw small booths with DVDs, stickers and t-shirts. Volunteers handed out Thai flags, as well as banners saying "CNS get out!" The crowd was energetic and jubilant.

BANGKOK'S LATEST EXTREME SPORT: PREM-BASHING

14. (C) While a small segment of anti-government memorabilia has targeted elder statesman and Privy Councilor Prem Tinsulanonda, DAAD leaders had kept their attacks on the venerable "Uncle Prem" relatively indirect in previous rallies. Jakrapop Penkhae, one of the youngest and most energetic DAAD leaders, dismissed this restraint on June 23, with surprisingly direct verbal barrages. Jakrapop pivoted from an attack on Army (and CNS) leaders Sonthi and Saprang by stating that Prem was behind the coup and should resign. Flyers attacking Prem for "acting like royalty" and failing to show appropriate respect for the King circulated. One enterprising group of protesters even organized a mock cremation/funeral march for the Privy Council head. (Note: Press reports on June 25 suggested that legal action may be taken against Jakrapop for these statements. End Note.)

OFF TO ARMY HQ

15. (SBU) By 1430 hours, the growing crowd marched to Army headquarters a little over a kilometer away. Police contacts estimated the crowd at 6,000 strong; CNS contacts said that up to 22,000 people were involved. Our own count put the crowd at 15,000 or so. The crowd moved slowly, but steadily, and protest leaders carefully halted the march when faced with barricades and several hundred policemen on the street leading to Army HQ. The entire caravan appeared well-organized and carefully managed. After negotiating with police officials, the barricades were removed and protesters

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moved forward to the gates of the Army command. From this vantage point, DAAD leaders continued their loudspeaker-enabled speeches against the CNS, while warning their followers not to attack the police or incite violence. Police at the scene did not carry weapons and kept their distance from the crowd; several officers appeared to be handing out water to protesters. A CNS spokesman told us that military personnel were being kept confined to Army HQ as a reserve force, but did not expect them to be used.

HELLO ISAAN!

16. (C) Poloff spoke to several protesters at the rally. In contrast to previous DAAD gatherings, the majority (of this admittedly unscientific sample) said they were from the poor, rural Northeast. One self-professed organizer told us that he had organized the movement of 2,000 people from his home province. Despite efforts by Army officials to prevent the movement of protesters from the countryside, this group had used personal vehicles instead of easily detected charter buses to come to the capital for the protest. When asked how these people could afford such a journey, this organizer said that former members of parliament (e.g. Thai Rak Thai MPs) distributed money through local government officials to fund the effort. In a separate conversation, a young protester from Surin (a northeastern province) told Poloff, with apparent sincerity, that he was personally angry at the ouster of Thaksin and the unwillingness of Thai media outlets to report "the truth" on the CNS and Surayud government. "This isn't democracy. Is it?"

RAIN-OUT

17. (SBU) By 1600 or so, heavy rain assaulted the now tired crowd. Despite the best efforts of food vendors flooding the area, a significant portion of protesters departed, leaving a soggy group of approximately 5,000 people in front of Army HQ. Despite a pledge to "hold" this area until 2330, DAAD organizers led the crowd back to Sanam Luang at 1830. An

estimated 8,000 people returned to Sanam Luang on June 24, but did not march anywhere.

ONE RALLY LEADER'S AGENDA

18. (C) We met privately on June 20 with Prathip Ungsongtham Hata--a former Senator, prominent social activist and one of the DAAD leaders. Condemning the CNS and draft constitution, Prathip advocated the immediate resignation of the coup leaders and called for immediate elections under the provisions of the abrogated 1997 constitution. Although not affiliated with the Thai Rak Thai party, she expressed strong support for former PM Thaksin's populist policies and criticized the May 30 court-ordered dissolution of his party as anti-democratic. Prathip said that any violence stemming from the protests would originate with the military and not the demonstrators. We believe that Prathip, like some of the demonstrators in the crowd, expressed genuine convictions and was not simply acting as a paid shill of Thaksin.

COMMENT

19. (C) Several RTG leaders have publicly (and privately) dismissed the DAAD rallies as a spent force. Even with the provision of a Thakin-interview video last week and new "revelations" about CNS perfidy (not to mention payments for attendance) the rallies have failed to gain traction. A recent poll in Bangkok reportedly found that nearly 75 percent of capital residents viewed the protests as a nuisance. With the prospect of earlier-than-expected elections, what little energy and attention the DAAD had may be fading for good.

BOYCE